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Professional development

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Robert L. Steele



Robert L. Steele, Partner-in-Charge of Personnel

Mr. John R. Wildman, the partner who organized the Haskins & Sells department of professional training in 1918, described its purpose as follows:

"The problem is to develop an effective staff, comprised of carefully selected, well-trained accountants who will be interested in their work, happy in their environment, satisfied in their professional relations, have a sense of loyalty to the Firm, have a voluntary desire to render a high class of service to clients and to work generally for the Firm's best interests.

"An effective staff is one which will respond quickly and satisfactorily to the demands of those who have the exercise of managerial functions. As a unit the staff must be adaptable to the many varieties of work, plastic in meeting the requirements of special circumstances, and more or less elastic according to the volume of work. The members of the staff should, therefore, be of the proper material and calibre, educated for their work, capable, willing, and resourceful."

Early Programs

Mr. Wildman, a former accounting professor and first president of what is now the American Accounting Association, was a logical choice to head up the new department. He initially centered attention on the training of new recruits. The program was, however, steadily broadened to provide material on new concepts of accounting, auditing, and reporting for our entire organization.

Mr. Wildman early established a college recruitment program to insure a constant replenishment of the vitality of the organization through the annual enrollment of specially selected young men. It was through this program that men such as John Queenan and Weldon Powell became associated with the Firm. In 1920, Mr. Wildman established the Executive Office training course, which was the forerunner of our present college graduate training course.

The basic need to develop an effective staff is the same today as it was then. The knowledge, theories, and

HASKINS & SELLS
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

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NEW YORK, MARCH 15, 1918

Introducing the Department for Professional Training

Heading of a lead article in the **Haskins & Sells Bulletin** some forty-five years ago

techniques required by accountants, however, have been changing rapidly. The increasing use of mechanical and electronic equipment, increasingly complex tax laws, improved control and management techniques, the influence of regulatory bodies, and the demands of more sophisticated users of financial data have made it difficult for even experienced accountants to keep up to date.

The beginning accountant, who must assimilate the accumulated knowledge of the past as well as keep up on the current changes, is faced with a double burden. This requires that he apply himself diligently in his early years to catch up with the rest of the profession.

Principles of Development

The concepts as to how a man develops have also changed. We used to think in terms of professional training; we now think of professional development, a broader concept. A training program teaches "how" something is done, whereas a development program teaches "why" something is done as well as "how". We must know the "why" for all the actions and decisions we are expected to make and for all the responsibilities we assume.

Three principles about the development process have emerged which seem to be most applicable to professional accountants.

One of these is that development is an individual matter. Each individual is different. Each has a different background, different needs, different interests, and different goals. All individuals cannot develop from some one method, such as rotation, staff meetings, or individual study. We recognize this and have developed a variety of programs, materials, and guides so that each man can use the combination of methods that will be most beneficial to him.

A second principle is that all development is self-development. This means that an individual must take responsibility for his own development, because development is not something that can be done *to* a man. The Firm naturally has an interest in his development and

will do whatever it can to help; but it cannot undertake the task of "developing" the man. The motivation, the desire, the effort, and the responsibility lie with the man himself.

The Firm will provide real opportunity for growth, plenty of orientation and educational activities and materials, encouragement, time, and recognition of results. In the last analysis, however, it is up to the individual. He must understand and believe that in the area of personal development, as in any other activity, he must give something of extra value in order to receive something of extra value.

Another principle is that we learn best by experience. A man's development comes primarily from his experience in day-to-day work. This is particularly true in a profession like public accounting. We must recognize, however, that in the same period of time one man may have three years' experience while another may have only one year's experience repeated three times. The difference lies in what the men have learned from their experience, and this probably depends not on what happened to them, but on what they did with what happened to them. I'm sure you have seen it many times. One man, when faced with a problem, immediately takes it to his supervisor and asks for an answer. A second man, under similar circumstances, studies the problem, gives some thought to it, researches it if necessary, arrives at a tentative answer, and then goes to the supervisor to check on the correctness of his answer. Which man has gained most from the experience?

We should keep in mind that development is a process of growth and change. It is not a process that occurs immediately but over a period of time. The period will vary among individuals, and that is why some men progress at a different rate than others.

Requirements for Success in Accounting

A man at the college graduate training course last summer asked me if I could briefly state the requirements for success in public accounting. I told him

that broadly speaking success depended upon two things—a man's native ability and his willingness to apply himself. A man has no control over his ability. He has full control, however, over the manner in which he applies himself to his work and to his development.

If I were to be a little more specific, I would say that success in public accounting requires three things—technical competence, positive personal attributes, and supervisory ability.

The first and most basic of these is technical competence. Without this, the others are meaningless. Technical competence is derived from many sources, such as daily work assignments, counseling from supervisors, study of technical materials, attendance at accounting lectures and courses, review of work done by others, reading of technical releases, research, common sense, and discussions with more experienced men. The rate of development in this area will depend to a great extent on the attitude of the individual and the amount of time and energy expended.

Personal attributes are more difficult to define and more difficult to change. There is no standard mold for a professional man. Each is an individual and therefore different. None is perfect, but the more successful men seem to have many of the following traits—a pleasant personality, neat appearance, modesty, conscientiousness, sincerity, integrity, ability to win clients' confidence, tenacity and thoroughness, ability to speak well and convincingly, a sound and lively imagination, a professional attitude, and the usual social graces. Although it is difficult to do, we can improve our personality and other personal traits if we objectively analyze our shortcomings and assiduously apply ourselves to changing them.

As a man progresses in public accounting, he finds that more and more people look to him for direction. He will reach a limit in how far he can go unless he develops the ability to supervise others. This limit is determined by the amount of work he can personally do. To function effectively in an advanced position he must learn to get things done through other people. After

he develops an acceptable level of competence, his failure or success will be measured more in terms of his effectiveness in organizing and supervising the work of others than in terms of technical skills or knowledge.

A successful supervisor must develop the ability to separate the essential from the non-essential, plan work and schedule time effectively, organize the little things, do the difficult jobs first, decide trifles quickly, delegate work and the responsibility for its completion, allow subordinates to make decisions on routine details, assign work that challenges the abilities of subordinates, maintain a constructive rather than a critical attitude, and accept full responsibility for results.

The real problem of personal development—and it is a difficult one—is to find the time to do the things we know must be done. Time, itself, is inflexible but the demands upon it are not. Work, family, recreation, professional development, public and professional service, and sleep all compete for the use of our time. We must therefore accommodate our demands within the time that is available. We can do this effectively only by analyzing our demands, weighting them for relative importance, and organizing our time accordingly.

Do you remember the old signs on the wall that read: "Do it Now"? I sometimes think we should revive those signs. We lose enough time each day through procrastination to take care of our personal development. I urge each of you to sit down today and develop a plan that provides a specified number

of hours each week for self development and then try to adhere as closely as possible to your plan. This requires discipline and, I might add, a bit of cooperation from your wife.

Just setting aside some time is not the only answer. Because there is not enough time for everything, we must learn to be selective and concentrate our available time on the more important items. These will vary with the needs and interests of the individual. Keep in mind the old saying: "It's not the hours you put in that count, it's what you put in the hours." Make every hour count. I know of no better way to expedite your advancement.

The Firm's Responsibilities

I have been talking primarily of your responsibilities, but I recognize that our Firm also has responsibilities to you. In the first place we recognize that we must conduct our practice in such a manner as to merit a reputation for integrity and competence which will instill a feeling of pride in you and your family because of your connection with the Firm. We must conduct our affairs in such a way as to maintain our position in the profession and extend our practice so as not only to provide employment for you, but also to provide you with steady and unlimited opportunity for growth and advancement.

We accept the responsibility for providing you with experience that will help you develop your talents and sharpen your judgment. We are giving substantial time and thought to the development of courses, programs, and materials that will be most helpful to you in your personal development. We recognize a duty to you to discuss with you personally at regular intervals your progress or lack of it. Our goal is that of implementing your progress at a rate that is limited solely by your own capacity for growth.

Most of us operate at a fraction of our real potential, primarily because we do not fully develop or utilize the talents we have. Our personal goal should be to develop ourselves to the limit of our individual capacity, so that toward the end we may be able to say with Richter, the German novelist known as "Jean Paul": "I have made as much out of myself as could be made of the stuff."



Los Angeles Office provides CPA Review Course for members of the staff (See article, page 10)